

Chapter 376 Slaughterhouse

The Hunter's Den was busy, at least a dozen people moving about, emptying the shelves from anything useful they could find.

Elana was coordinating it all from the central table as well as talking to four people in front of her.

The people rushed out a moment later, grim expressions on the faces not hidden by armor or masks.

"Ilea. And... Maro." Elana said when she saw the two. "You're late." Her expression didn't offer much.

"I come and go as I please." Ilea said and smiled.

Elana nodded and approached them. "There is no time for jokes. Something happened in the Descent. Corrupted monsters are coming up to the first layer, frenzied and enraged. We're trying to contain it as well as bolster our defenses here but it's proving difficult."

"I'm sorry for the lack of welcome but your help would make a difference. Catelyn is already down there, fighting." Elana quickly explained. She was tired and stressed, that much was obvious but still she remained focused and kept the account concise.

"How long has this been going on?" Ilea asked.

"A little over a week." Elana said. "Don't let them injure you, the corruption is... dangerous."

Ilea cracked her neck and smiled. *Seems more like a job I can do, compared to finding missing people and setting up trade agreements.*

"We'll check it out." Ilea replied.

"Stay safe." Elana said. "The both of you."

Ilea nodded and blinked out before she started running, towards the Abyss and the fastest way to the Descent. "Corrupted monsters...", she muttered.

"She was concerned." Maro said to her side.

They reached the bar and rushed through, teleporting down the vertical stone shaft before continuing on downwards.

"She's never concerned." The former king added.

Coming out in the expanding underground cave less than a minute later, it became a little more clear why.

The vast forest was alight with blazing fires, the smell of burning wood and flesh reaching up to the highest point of the cave where Ilea and Maro were hovering. Smoke plumed from various burning sections.

Steam was rising from the lake, explosions of fire and other magics lighting up in the distance and rumbling through. The noise of battle was apparent, even from this far away.

Dozens of wide spanning spells were visible. "Let's go and join the fray." Ilea's words were lost in the noise, both to Maro and herself.

Her intent however was clear, her wings moving as she shot down and forward.

A couple seconds later, Ilea impacted on the ground among the raging fires where a cluster of spells had exploded moments earlier, her weight and some of her ashen tendrils digging into the scorched earth. Dark ones hovered over the smoking remains of trees, some were running past with their blades and weapons.

Ilea followed.

The screeching, snarling and howling of various beasts was audible, coming from ahead. She didn't know if they were dark ones or monsters.

Scarred and scattered remains of unidentifiable creatures littered the blackened earthy ground as she sped through and came to an abrupt stop, using her ashen limbs.

A huge bear with singed brown fur turned her way, one black eye focusing on her as he roared, muscles rippling, some completely exposed. The right side of his skull was fractured, split open with a dark orange sludge dripping out, pulsing with life and magic.

[Corrupted Farngard – lvl 174]

Ilea had no time to assess the situation, the monster charging at her immediately. Powerful steps propelled the massive animal forward with somewhat unsure footing.

Ashen limbs slashed out as she stood there, tearing through the beast's hide, body and organs. Ilea made sure to target the orange sludge with one of her limbs.

The bear died the instant his body was ripped through, unable to defend against or react to the attack.

'ding' 'You have defeated [Corrupted Farngard – lvl 174]'

Corrupted. She looked at the orange sludge sticking to her ashen limb before she shook hit off, splattering it to the ground.

She moved on, cutting through a group of wolf like creatures showing wounds on their bodies with the same orange ooze dripping out. Their lightning magic fizzled out against her ashen armor, most of it completely avoided in the first place.

'ding' 'You have defeated Kohlwolf – lvl 163'

'ding' 'You have defeated Kohlwolf – lvl 178'

'ding' 'You have defeated Kohlwolf – lvl 180'

The beasts were attacking her on sight, completely uncaring for their approach or own safety. In itself it wasn't much of a surprise, Ilea having fought similarly behaving monsters previously. It was something in their eyes, the way they moved and the sheer ferocity they showed that stood out however.

A nearby dark one was getting overwhelmed when Ilea appeared with a blink.

Her ash tore through a dozen creatures, mostly wolves and insect like monsters. All below level two hundred. Gore, orange ooze and blood splattered the ground as she helped the dark one up, healing him in the process. "What are those creatures?" Ilea shouted over the noise.

Another three wolves rushed them, impaled on ashen limbs that completely skewered them before they were tossed aside.

The dark one heaved for air and clutched his two handed curved sword. “Corrupted... beasts. You just arrived?” He was looking around frantically, his voice suggesting exhaustion.

Ilea nodded and sent ten ashen spears into three oncoming mantis like creatures, two meters in height and moving with high speed. Thin legs and bodies, single near blade like claws adorned the arms as well as sharp long teeth in their maws.

The ash shredded through them, Ilea’s limbs finishing the two that had survived her spears. Muscles still twitched as the ash exited.

‘ding’ ‘You have defeated [Corrupted Jagged Mantis – lvl 238]

...

‘ding’ ‘You have defeated [Corrupted Jagged Mantis – lvl 253]

Pretty high level. She noted the silence of the Dark One. “Where is Catelyn?”

“I don’t know... it’s chaos. I suggest you find the biggest fire. Thank you ashen healer.” He sighed, looking for the next target.

“What are those creatures?” Ilea asked, forming more ashen lances in the air above her.

A corrupted bear broke through a damaged tree and was killed with a single ash lance to its head, the momentary stun giving ample time to aim.

The Dark One’s attention was back on her. “They’re creatures from the Descent, various layers. The orange puss they all have on them is a...,” He was interrupted by a loud roar.

A familiar roar as Ilea noted, seeing the approach of a near flying beast of towering size, hammer like bone arms coming down on her.

Ilea’s arms lifted and took the impact, her ashen limbs tearing into the beast at the same time. They came to a stop a couple meters further back.

[Blood Carrier – lvl 321]

The disfigured form of muscle, bone and gore was torn up even more than the last one she had met, already showing cuts, half of its torso pulsing with the orange corruption.

It died seconds later, Ilea’s destructive healing mana pushing into it as her limbs dug deeper with each passing moment.

‘ding’ ‘You have defeated [Blood Carrier – lvl 321] – For defeating an enemy ten or more levels above your own, bonus experience is granted.

That one was close to death already. “Go on!” She shouted to the Dark One who was clutching his weapon but hadn’t much moved since her arrival.

“The orange puss.” Ilea supplied, seeing his lack of words.

“Yes... a corruption. It will infect and kill if you are wounded by any of them. The beasts are frenzied and will seek out and attack anything that doesn’t carry the corruption.” The warrior explained.

“What’s the plan?” Ilea asked, seeing a corrupted Pure Blooded approach, half scorched and missing an arm. Still it moved on, instantly focusing on the two when its eyes focused.

Her sphere spotted another two monsters approaching quickly from behind. Wolves.

“We have to stop them, at all cost.” The Dark one said and watched Ilea tear through the three monsters with ease.

“Where are the biggest groups?” Ilea asked and extended a hand to the warrior.

He caught on and grabbed her arm, his form much larger than hers. “No groups, they’re everywhere!”

[Warrior – lvl 221]

Ilea ascended, looking for fires and spells. She spotted a number of flying archers and mages through the smoke and flames, sending their attacks down into the burning forest.

The warrior pointed. “The cracks, where the beasts emerge.”

“Should I bring you somewhere?” Ilea asked as she sped up to where he had indicated.

“Any group you see.” He shouted in response.

She did spot four dark one warriors fighting alongside a dwarf with magic support from above. They were being overwhelmed by dozens of monsters.

Ilea let go of the Dark One who landed in a roll, his blade cleaving a wolf in two. Her ash spread out, both healing the injured as well as ripping through the beasts.

Many of them she had never seen and yet they all had the corruption in common. She was about to move on when she noted that the injured two warriors were still retching, orange pulsing growths forming near the injuries that wouldn’t heal with her magic.

“What the fuck.” She exclaimed and stepped closer, a jumping Pure Blooded impaled by five ashen limbs as his blood splattered down on her.

The dwarf stepped up and ripped open the damaged plate armor of his friend. “Healing won’t help. We have to carve it out!” He shouted and unsheathed a blade. “It takes a couple days to take over but with a healer here, we can do it now.”

Ilea watched on in horror as the dwarf started cutting into the pus and the wound, the warrior screaming at the pain, attracting more beasts.

“This is fucked up.” Ilea murmured to herself and pushed the dwarf aside. An ashen limb moved into the man’s mouth to separate his teeth. Healing magic flowed into him as two more of her limbs formed thin bladed tips, cutting out the corrupted wound in an instant.

A yelp resounded from below the helmet before the wound closed again quickly. She grabbed the plate armor and forced it closed again.

The man heaved and cried as he clutched where the wound had been.

“Move back, form a defensible position. You’re surrounded.” Ilea said as she cut through the corruption on the other man’s leg. The wound was healed again, taking a little longer as half his thigh had to be removed.

They nodded to her and grabbed the previously injured people, rushing back into the forest.

The smoke was itching in her throat, making her eyes water slightly. Circulating healing mana through herself made those sensations stop, a full on forest fire raging around her by now. Trees groaned before chunks of wood fell down.

She pressed on, through the flames as she cut down every beast she came across. A flare of magic and fire made her turn to the left, running through the ruined and burning thicket.

Ilea came out of the trees and found the burning form of Catelyn, reaching three meters in height and twice that in length. Claws ripped through whole swaths of beasts that tried to latch onto her.

The corruption from her wounds was burned away instantly, the heat she exuded alone was enough to singe the monsters. Still they came and rushed at her, uncaring for their coming demise.

Ilea joined in, a quick flight making her land a dozen meters away from the fox, flanking her.

A charged Heart of Cinder extended out, disintegrating at least forty creatures before she blinked away, appearing with a flurry of limbs that ripped through bodies, skulls and bone.

“Ilea.” Catelyn said, her voice deep. Angry.

“Hey Cat.” Ilea said, extending one of her limbs to check on the fox’s health. “You’re in pretty bad shape.”

[Mage – lvl 328]

Catelyn opened her mouth, a massive cone of flame setting ablaze an oncoming dozen monsters. “I’ve been fighting... for some time.”

“Sure.” Ilea said, already healing her. “What’s the plan? Just slaughter everything that comes up?”

“For now... We need space... perimeter, defenses.” Catelyn said when she looked up.

A beam of purple energy slammed through approaching monsters, decaying flesh and bone alike.

Maro kept floating nearby. “What happened to this dungeon?” He shouted, beams continuing to form.

Catelyn roared, a loud noise to attract more of the beasts. Perhaps it had another effect too besides the pure rage.

Ilea couldn’t tell. “We’ll thin them out.”

A dark one landed a couple meters away, one she already knew. His whole form was wreathed in shadow, four arms each holding a short sword, blood and orange pus dripping from the blades. A black metal mask hid his face, a horn jutting out from each cheek. The red vertical line of paint was barely discernible behind all the blood.

“Ilas.” Catelyn said.

[Warrior – lvl 254]

He simply nodded once, vanishing a moment later before he appeared amongst a group of beasts. His blades moved similar to Ilea’s ash, a flurry of steel, reflecting the light of the flames.

There’s so many of them. Ilea thought as she saw the shadows move beyond the blazing fires.

“We need a line, somewhere to make our stand!” Maro shouted.

“Here.” Catelyn replied, fumes rising from the edges of her mouth. Her eyes squinted, focused once more thanks to Ilea’s healing.

Here it is. Ilea thought with a smile and blinked after the warrior wreathed in shadows.

There were more wolves, bears, pure blooded and variations, a number of insect species as well as the occasional reptile. All corrupted, all immediately focusing on her, guided by sight, smell, sound or magic detection.

To her ash, it was all the same. Writhing tendrils slashed and tore through dozens of monsters with every passing second. Ilea blinked and moved, sometimes flying up and landing again to avoid the magic and claws coming at her from the mass of monstrosities. Her ashen limbs helped dodge and move from time to time, their far reach and strength easily serving as additional legs to navigate with.

Heart of Cinder was released in cones, aimed from several of her limbs before it disintegrated dozens if not hundreds of the corrupted creatures. Every thirty to sixty seconds, she released the heat constantly forming within her.

The field was littered in corpses, blood and bones, writhing orange ooze spilling out of thousands of wounds as the ashen healer appeared and vanished.

Monsters screeched and howled, fighting to get to her, to tear her apart with all their limbs and teeth, all the magic they could muster and whatever strength their bodies could give.

It was futile. Their sheer strength not enough to stop the monster amongst them.

Twenty minutes passed, perhaps longer, Ilea falling into a trance of battle where every move had a deadly purpose. Every strike and limb, every spell focused on making her the most efficient at killing the mostly lower leveled monsters.

She got to know them, their spells, their weaknesses, learned that the corruption was a weakness to exploit, whatever instinct and intelligence these beasts once had, replaced by anger and ferocity.

What they lacked in everything else, they made up in numbers, ten and twenty times over. Like the unending waves of the ocean, more and more monsters poured out of the crevices in the earth, leading down farther into the layered dungeon.

They get stronger the further down they are. Ilea noted, some rare beasts taking longer to kill, some cutting deeper into her ash. And still it was nothing, the spells aimed at her doing little but give back some of the mana she was using.

Few of her punches and strikes were fueled by attack skills, the sheer strength and durability of her ash enough to kill most of the frenzied creatures.

A while later, Ilea started to see glimpses of other mages, specifically Maro and Catelyn in the distance. Their magic cut through the uncontrolled masses as more and more flying mages joined. She assumed the same was true for warriors fighting on the ground.

Seems like we made a small dent already. The numbers never waned however, every strike of her ash finding purchase.

Whenever she flew up, Ilea found the numbers remaining similar. *How many of them are down there?*

Maro's purple beams appeared a while later, the necromancer flying closer before his magic ceased. "I need to recharge!" He shouted over the sounds of battle.

Ilea flew up to him, ignoring the thorns, lances and bolts of lightning flying up from below. The beasts simply kept moving, the vortex of death she had formed undone, letting loose hundreds of them upon the terrain.

“Go get the elves and Terok, it’s just a couple hours away. We need everyone we can get.” Ilea shouted and blinked downwards, not waiting for a response.

She tried getting back in the way of the running monsters but was sure a couple dozen at least were gone already.

Maro leaving his position would cost them as well, making Ilea move a little further towards where he had fought. She twirled and laughed as the beasts were ripped apart, feeling more like a corporate shredder than she had ever before.

Few of them proved a challenge worth more than a couple additional seconds, a couple more spells unleashed. Any mana she lost during those phases, she would gain back from the enemy spells.

Ilea was prepared to fight for hours, even days with the low mana expenditure and her high recovery. Depending on the masses and how well the others did, her alone just might not be enough to stop all this. *A Hand might be nice.* She thought, flying through the blood and guts.